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Subject: comments on SFRA-Aqua 2

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January 21, 2002

To: John Greis & David Wear

Re: Comment on the Southern Forest Resource Assessment  
Aqua 2

Dear John and Dave:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on, Aqua 2: Forested Wetlands.

This chapter of the Southern Forest Resource Assessment has a number of problems and should be sent back for revisions.

In section 4, page 5, considerable care is dedicated to explaining the difference between wetland "loss" and wetland "conversion". Conversion is defined as "a change in vegetative cover on an area that is still a wetland." Loss, on the other hand, is defined as "a change in which an area no longer has the hydrologic characteristics of a wetland." These two conditions imply considerably different environmental impacts.

In section 5.1, the author begins with a discussion of wetlands lost, however, in the third paragraph he begins by quoting figures that combine wetlands lost with wetlands converted, then quotes figures for wetlands lost, and then switches back again to figures that combine the two. Following is an example that I think illustrates the confusing:

From section 5.1, paragraph 2:

"Hefner and Brown (1985) reported that for the period between the 1950's and 1970's the South sustained the greatest wetland losses in the country."

From section 5.1, paragraph 3:

"Forested wetlands in these 10 Southeastern States were lost or converted at an average rate of 276,000 acres per year from the 1950's to 1970's but lost at an average of 345,000 acres per year from the 1970's to 1980's (Hefner and others 1994).

In my view, since lost and converted mean two very different things, care should be taken to keep comparisons based on the same terminologies.

Similarly confusing is the information presented on Table 1, page 34. Here the '86 to '97 comparison of wetlands lost actually shows more “forested” wetlands lost than “total” wetlands lost. The figures that pertain to the Southeastern US show the same. This table needs to be looked at again.

Although the author relies primarily on data from the NWI Status and Trends reports, he also includes data from the NRI, prepared by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The data from these two reports do not agree, the author stating, “Differences in definitions for attributing loss are a primary reason for discrepancies in wetland loss and conversion estimates between NWI and NRI.” To gain a better understanding of the difference between these two data sets, it would be helpful to see a comparison of the definitions.

For the most part, SFRA is a tremendously helpful document. I hope these comments help make SFRA an even better report.

Yours truly,  
Matt Bennett  
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